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COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS
Sub-Commission on Prevention of
Discrimination and Protection
of Minorities
Fiftieth session
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QUESTION OF THE VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS, INCLUDING POLICIES OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION AND SEGREGATION AND OF APARTHEID, IN ALL COUNTRIES, WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO COLONIAL AND OTHER DEPENDENT COUNTRIES AND TERRITORIES: REPORT OF THE SUB-COMMISSION UNDER COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS RESOLUTION 8 (XXIII)

Written statement submitted by the International Federation of Human Rights Leagues, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[24 July 1998]

GE.98-13448 (E)

1. Since the Sub-Commission adopted resolution 1997/2 on Bahrain, the International Federation of Human Rights Leagues (FIDH) and its member organization, the Committee for the Defence of Human Rights in Bahrain (CDHRB), have continued to register gross, massive and systematic violations of human rights. In its statement before the fifty-third session of the Commission on Human Rights, FIDH and CDHRB expressed their deep concern regarding the systematic violation of human rights in Bahrain. However, no step was taken by the Commission on this situation. They consider that this situation requires further examination by the Sub-Commission.

Torture and ill-treatment

2. The situation of prisoners remains very worrying. Torture and ill-treatment of political detainees and prisoners is a wide and systematic practice. The detained leaders of the opposition, including Sheikh Al-Jamri, have been subjected to tremendous psychological pressures. For example, Sheikh Al-Jamri has been forced to sign a confession which would be used against him during his trial. He was transferred to the military hospital early May as a consequence of these pressures.

3. FIDH and CDHRB welcome the ratification of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment by Bahrain, as requested in resolution 1997/2. However, this important step will remain meaningless if not translated into acts. So far, the Government has shown no political will to bring either legislation or practice into line with the Convention.

Mass arrests and use of excessive force by the police

4. Mass arrests of pro-Constitution activists continue following protests, demonstrations and religious celebrations. During Muhram, from 17 April to 26 May 1998, a period when people of the Shia community commemorate the Krabla massacre, the security forces attacked the ceremony and the procession repeatedly, using firearms, tear gas and sticks, and arresting many. Sanafes, Al-Daih and Shakura were among the targeted districts. The detainees include Abdullah H. Al-Sayegh, 66 years old, Abdulla Al-Bari, 15 years old, and Abdulla Al-Tublani, 23 years old, who are still in prison. Hundreds of others arrested were added to the approximately 2,000 political detainees. Some of the arrested were beaten severely.

5. Last May, Nizar Al-Qare served his sentence, but a few days after his release, the police came after him. He has been forced to flee the country.

6. The Working Group on Enforced or Arbitrary Detention of the Commission on Human Rights has taken a number of decisions in the past years declaring detentions to be arbitrary. FIDH and CDHRB call upon the Bahraini authorities to implement all decisions of the Working Group.

Harsh sentences and unfair trials

7. Trials of many political opponents, including women and children, have continued to be held before the State Security Court. On 27 May 1998 scores of pro-Constitution activists were tried before the Court. They were accused

of burning the mosque of their community at Iskab Jedhafas. The verdict was based on confessions extracted under torture. Harsh sentences of up to seven years' imprisonment have been pronounced. Some of the accused are young men aged 19.

Racial discrimination

8. The Bahraini population is divided into two different comunities: the Shia and the Sunni. Although the majority of the people are Shiites, the power is held by the Sunnis.

9. Although the State of Bahrain ratified the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination in 1990, the discriminatory and sectarian policy against the Shia community continues in the university, in governmental employment policies and in recruitement for the armed and security forces (the armed forces belong to the Ministry of Defence while security forces belong to the Ministry of the Interior). Those involved in opposition activities are dismissed from their government jobs. The present state of affairs contravenes the Convention, whose States parties undertake to ensure the right to free choice of employment. National legislation was not amended so as to be in conformity with the Convention.

10. In order to introduce demographic change in its favour, the State of Bahrain follows a policy of recruitment of mercenaries among Arab bedouins and expatriates to bolster the armed and security forces.

Restriction of freedom of expression

11. Contrary to the right to freedom of opinion and expression and the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association, guaranteed by article 5 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the State of Bahrain has taken hard measures against NGOs. The Lawyers Society was subjected to State control, while the cultural club Al-Oroba was prohibited from hosting a lecture. BBC correspondent Ismat Al-Muswaï was ordered to stop reporting and prohibited from writing in the local press along with the writer and journalist Hafed Al-Shaik.

12. FIDH and CDHRB want to underline that hundreds of Bahraini dissidents are still forced to live in exile.

Situation of children

13. FIDH and CDHRB express their deep concern regarding the situation of the children in Bahrain. Children are subjected to various forms of abuse, illustrated by the case of a group from Sitra who were arrested arbitrarily during the second week of May for participating in a demonstration. Among them were Hassan A. Hussein, 13 years old, Hassan Y. Ihsan, 14 years old, Abas J. Abdul-Rid, 15 years old, and Jaber A. Ali, 16 years old. This situation amounts to a violation of article 37 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by the State of Bahrain in 1990. Although the State of

Bahrain has been a party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child for six years, it has not yet reported on the implementation of the Convention. FIDH and CDHRB urge the Government of Bahrain to submit its initial report to the Committee.

Persistent refusal of international scrutiny

14. The State of Bahrain still bans the visits of international human rights organizations, despite repeated requests. The agreement that Bahrain concluded with the International Committee of the Red Cross is not sufficient to permit other organizations to observe the human rights situation in the State. The United Nations thematic special rapporteurs have pointed out the lack of cooperation of the State of Bahrain. Their reports and their recommendations to the Government of Bahrain have not been implemented.

15. The adoption of resolution 1997/2 sent a strong signal to the Bahraini authorities; it should not remain an isolated act, particularly as human rights violations have continued. FIDH and CDHRB urge the Sub-Commission to keep Bahrain on its agenda. They also request the Sub-Commission to call upon the Commission to examine the situation of human rights in Bahrain and, if the Commission is unable to take action at its next session, to continue consideration of the matter at its fifty-first session under agenda item 2.